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Abstract: This article looks at what origin stories teach about the world and what kind of material presence they have in Southwestern Amazonia. We examine the ways the Apurinã relate to certain nonhuman entities through their origin story, and our theoretical approach is language materiality, as we are interested in material means of mediating traditional stories. Analogous to the ways that speakers of many other languages who distinguish the entities that they talk to or about, the Apurinã make use of linguistic resources to establish the ways they interact with different entities. Besides these resources, the material means of mediating stories is a crucial tool to narrate the worlds of humans and nonhumans. Storytelling requires material mediation, and a specific context of plant substances. It also involves community meeting as a space of trust in order to become a communicative practice and effectively introduce the history of the people. Our sources are ethnography, language documentation, and autoethnography.

Keywords: Amazonia; materiality; metamorphosis; oral history; trust

1 Introduction

Language can be written or oral, and may include many other forms of communication, such as images, behavior, signs, and gestures that are practiced and directed in relation to different life forms and subjective perspectives understood to exist in the world. In Amazonian Indigenous verbal and nonverbal aspects of

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language, myths, chants, material culture and objects, such as musical instruments, and geometric designs and images can all express the same repertoire, information, and notions. Furthermore, these aspects do not only produce knowledge, but are tools of memorization and even materially make things happen in the world (e.g. Hill 2009; Seeger 1987; Severi 2014; Severi and Lagrou 2013; see also Cajete 2000). Furthermore, certain landscape characteristics can reveal signs of one's ancestors and traces of their past activities (e.g. Virtanen 2019). Especially in Northwestern Amazonia (Santos-Granero 1998; Hugh-Jones 2012), origin stories have connections with actual physical places and the migration stories of peoples.

This article looks at what so-called origin stories teach us about the world, its beings, and to what extent orality has a material presence in Southwestern Amazonia. By origin stories we refer to those narrations that explain the origin of entities, and which in the Amazonian social-cosmos refer to the moments when specific issues become separated from other beings and gain more independent forms. Our theoretical approach is language materiality, and we are also interested in material means of mediating stories. Language materiality is an approach in linguistic anthropology that bridges the divide between language as an immaterial entity and materiality. It points to the material commodification of language, its material conditions, circulation, and its connections to power and material capital (Burkette 2015; Shankar and Cavanaugh 2012, 2017, see also e.g. Brenneis 1984; Gal 2003; Irvine 2001). Rhythms of orality have also been described as technologies that affect bodies in diverse material ways (e.g. Saussy 2016; Urban 2001). Recently, material mediums of language have been discussed in Amazonian contexts, namely blowing and healing (e.g. Echeverri 2015), and the bodies of speakers (e.g. High 2018) used to have effective communication with other humans or other-than-human beings.

We focus on the Apurinã's Tsurá *pirana* (a Tsurá hero story) and its material connections to the Apurinã's present. A study of the content of such narratives can reveal important clues about how the Apurinã people conceive their relationality with other-than-human entities and what material aspects the story telling requires. Such studies also show how stories and communication practices compose relationships with the environment in the Amazon. These relationships relate to the theme of language materiality, the topic of this special issue. The Apurinã, use the term *pirana* interchangeably for 'story' and 'history' (see also Virtanen et al. 2010 on the Manchineri). In Apurinã, *pirana* also means 'speech' and 'conversation' (Facundes 2000). Thus, whereas English speakers treat such concepts as distinct linguist categories, the Apurinã speakers express them as a single one, using the linguistic expression to highlight what they perceive as related concepts. The traditional stories can be about the ancient past (the time of the ancestors), but new stories are constantly narrated, especially when they describe what has

happened to people. We prefer not calling traditional narrations “myths,” which might lessen their truth-value among the Apurinã. Both myth and history are important expressions of Amazonian historical and cultural consciousness and structures, and they can be complementary (Turner 1988).

The analysis presented in this essay draws from ethnographic fieldwork, linguistic sources of language documentation, as well as autoethnography. First, we will describe the main events of *Tsura pirana* which describe the different relationships between the beings that are at the core of the story. Second, we address the metamorphosis of humans into other-than-human beings, and vice versa. This plays a crucial part in *Tsura pirana*, and still plays a role as a contemporary mediation between human and other-than-human (especially animal and plant) worlds. Third, we address the material means of narrating both traditional and contemporary stories, as well as the meanings given to materiality through stories.

Besides the material connections of the *Tsura* story to the Apurinã’s present, another aspect of language materiality that we show is how storytelling itself is elementally linked to the material means of mediating oral stories. It requires material mediation, a specific context of plant substances, and community meeting as a space of trust in order to become a communicative practice and effectively introduce the history of the people. Overall, our case sheds light on how humans and other-than-human beings have parallel worlds and worlds within worlds that are made and become articulated in specific time and space through material communicative practices.

2 Human and other-than-human beings in Apurinã traditional narratives, *Tsura pirana*

Language, being an important means to express and register the ways of interacting with different people and other entities, is sensitive to the distinctions people make among different entities, types of beings as well as social identities and positions. Tomasello (2003: 1) has noted that humans and other-than-human beings can communicate only with those with whom they have grown in the same linguistic community, and therefore humans differ drastically from animals, but they also differ in their communicative activities between human linguistic communities (see also Irvine 2001). In Amazonia such distinctions become challenging as previous studies have shown how in Indigenous Amazonia other-than-human beings are typically considered to occupy the same cultural spaces as humans and have similar intentional capacities and selfhood (Descola 2005; Lima 2005; Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2004), and even language (e.g. Chaumeil 1993; Hill and

Chaumeil 2011). It has also been argued that other-than-human beings and humans share humanity, but their difference is based on different bodies (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2004). In fact, human capacities to produce things and cultural products make a human society (Turner 2009). Overall, there are various differences among the Amazonian Indigenous groups, and their oral histories, practices, rituals, material and immaterial cultures reveal different ideas of drawing boundaries between humans and other-than-human beings.

The Apurinã (population approximately 8,000) live in several Indigenous reserves (demarcated Indigenous territories), mostly in the state of Amazonas, along the Central Purus River, Brazil, Southwestern Amazonia. This people self-identify as *Pupŷkary* and traditionally they are divided into two patrilineal cross-marrying moieties: *Xiwapurynyry* and *Meetymanety*. There is great diversity among this society, including fishing, hunting, and gathering communities who practice swidden agriculture, though a large number of the Apurinã live in urban environments or close to urban areas. The majority of Apurinã do not speak their Indigenous language, and therefore we also take examples from Portuguese and non-verbal communication. The traditional stories, and especially the *Tsura pirana*, are still actively narrated, both in Apurinã and Portuguese. Altogether, they open a door to look at the materiality of language deeply rooted in Apurinã thinking on social reality and being. For this article, our data comes mostly from the Tumiã, Camicuã, Água Preta, and Japiim Indigenous territories.

For the Apurinã, there is a special reason why the universe was created and given to humans, and how the Apurinã become Apurinã, or rather the *Pupŷkary*. Despite the fact that the Apurinã language is in a great danger of extinction, spoken actively only in some villages and elsewhere generally only by elders. The Apurinã people have a very rich repertoire of traditional narratives, and it is typically the elders who can tell longer versions of traditional stories.

As is typical for several other Amazonian Indigenous origin stories (e.g. Gow 1991), the Apurinã origin stories include animals who appear as humans and speak the language of humans. This greatly affects Apurinã's thinking about their relations and history with specific animals, but it also affects attitudes towards objects and other other-than-human beings. In this section, we will look in particular at *Tsura pirana*, the creation narrative, and the details that separate real humans, the main figures of the story, from other entities. The story also includes various metamorphoses, from human to other-than-human and vice versa, as well as transformations from one to another other-than-human being. In Apurinã socio-philosophies it is not simply that humanity is shared among human and other-than-human beings, as is the core of the theories of perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 1998; Lima 2005), and of animist ontologies (Descola 2005), but there are

specific differences between the community members and animals, such as their ambiguous character and untrustworthiness.

Here we are able to give only a very brief summary of Tsurá *pirana* (history/story), as the narrative continues for many hours. Even though the story is still actively narrated, some people tell only fragments of it, while others are better performers. Most importantly, as will be shown in the later section, the storytelling requires certain material mediation. The Apurinã, like the other neighboring Indigenous people in the Purus River region and elsewhere in the Amazon, have suffered a long history of assimilation and state schooling that have ignored the Indigenous histories, and their present and future. The spaces for telling stories have also dramatically changed due to extractivist economies, such as the rubber boom, and other activities that changed the social organization and governance of Indigenous societies; missionary activities, which changed the repertoire of the stories and the introduced new elements; schooling with the introduction of new skills and capabilities, such as writing; and urbanization, which has made Indigenous communities more dispersed.

The basic storyline is that there are two sisters, and after one of them dies in an accident, the other, Iakuneru, becomes pregnant and is subsequently killed, but her four offspring survive, and determine to revenge their mother's death by setting up special traps one at a time. Tsurá, the strongest and the cleverest, is the hero of the Apurinã and is the trickster among the four brothers. He lets himself be swallowed by a snake in order to be rescued later. When he is rescued, he brings out with him a woman and knowledge. However, unlike other groups, including non-Indians, his Apurinã relatives fail to learn from this knowledge.

There are many versions of this story with substantial differences, depending on the region (the territories along the BR-317 highway, the territories from Camicua to Pacia, and the territories in the Tapuã region), as well as some version with smaller differences, as the Apurinã narrate traditional stories according to their teachers, personality, and personal histories. Some narrations start from the moment when the sisters climb up a genipapo fruit tree to escape from a rain of fire that kills all other people. The first case of metamorphosis in the narrative is at the very beginning when a being, described as an old witch-like woman, Maiuryparu, is presented collecting the bones of people who died in the fire rain. Maiuryparu immediately devours the bones of people who had done bad things in life, whereas the bones of people who had done good deeds are buried, and from them the manioc staple is born. The first transformation then is about good people's bones being turned into a manioc plant, which is the key staple of the Apurinã people.

Two young women, Iakuneru and her sister, have climbed a genipapo tree to escape the fire rain, and some stories start only from this part. Maiuryparu spots them and tells them to climb down from the tree. They only do that after throwing

genipapo fruit at the old woman with long ugly teeth, who then becomes smaller and more human-like in appearance. Worthy of note here is the fact that the old woman's name Maiuryparu, means a scavenger bird *maiury* (-pa means 'female' and -ru means 'feminine'). Hence, the old woman is in fact a human bird, and after the fire she does a human job, cleaning the ground and collecting the bones of the people to plant them.

When there is the sun and its light, the two sisters, who had climbed a tree, descend, touch the ground, and start walking again. Maiuryparu takes the sisters to her house, where she lives with her husband. Maiuryparu calls the sisters her nieces. She wants then to marry her son, but the son is just a head. It rolls around, and tries to sleep in a hammock with the sisters, but falls down a hole. The sisters want to leave and find their grandparents, as they fear that they could be eaten, similar to what happened to Maiuryparu's son. The sisters leave early in the morning and meet an elderly man whose eyes were already harmed by Maiuryparu, and he warns the sisters to escape as soon as they can. He tells the sisters what way to take to their grandfathers (*totywakury*). He asks them to pass by the house of their grandfather, a mutum bird, who is married to agouti, who would tell the specific path to the land of the sisters' grandfathers and to their future father-in-law. As we have already seen, many entities are referred to by kin terms. Furthermore, the different entities talk to each other without any difficulty, and language also makes them similar in some sense.

Jumping ahead in the narrative, after escaping from Maiuryparu, Iakuneru and her sister come to the house of their relatives, grandfather mutum and his wife agouti. These kin animals offer a sort of porridge and bread (*kumery*). Porridges, such as those made from banana, are still consumed today, but mutum and agouti's porridge is slimy and comes from the nose of agouti, who is preparing it. Iakuneru and the sister do not take the porridge, nor the other food that is offered. As food and eating together is a crucial aspect of kinship in Amazonia (e.g. McCallum 1997), we can already notice that the kin animals are in some aspects different from the sisters, even if they are in a close relationship with them.

The sisters continue their journey, aiming for another relative's house, father in law, and guided by the animal "couple" mutum and agouti. They tell the sisters that when they see a dragonfly on the water, they should not walk with open legs. Iakuneru's sister, however, did not heed this warning, and was penetrated by an insect, a *peruta* (dragonfly), and consequently dies. A part of her body turns into a macaw, which was in fact her soul/spirit, and it pursues Iakuneru until she sends it away, as she does not want to have a dead's spirit with her.

There are many variations of this part of the story, as of the others. In one less common version, the Tsura story starts when the two sisters (in some versions there are three) are the only survivors. They walk in the world without knowing where to

go. The owl, *musa*, had given the sisters an important piece of advice, guiding them so they would not die. When the world is about to end the sisters should take two leaves, one from the *kinhary*, the moriche palm tree, and the other from the *tsapyryky* (açaí) palm tree. Consequently, they should climb up into a genipapo tree, and when the water rises, they should tap the tree with a *kinhary* leaf in order to make it grow. When the rain passes, they can tap the tree again, this time with a *tsapyryky* (açaí) leaf, so that it returns to a normal size. Both moriche and açaí are materially and immaterially important palm trees for the Apurinã.

According to all the versions of the story, the sisters are the real human. Furthermore, Iakuneru is eventually the sole surviving sister, and in most versions she arrives at the house of her relatives (her father-in-law), where, that very night after dark, Iakuneru is visited in her hammock by a mysterious man. Consequently, she prepares some black genipapo fruit ink, keeping it under her hammock, and dyes the body of the mysterious man, hoping to find out who he is the next morning. To her surprise, the next morning only the Sun's (*Atukatxi*) *mexikana* (tube) to inhale tobacco snuff (*awiri*) turns out to be marked by the genipapo paint. This paint cannot be washed away, but remains for weeks. Thus, Iakuneru finds out who the mysterious man was, and realizes that it is the *mexikana* that transforms itself into the man who comes to her hammock every night. Here again, the transforming entity is among the most important entities in the Apurinã social world, since tobacco snuff (*awiri*) is the elemental socio-cultural substance and practice of the Apurinã in their social and political life, and it is used almost daily. It is relevant here that the animated object, *mexikana*, makes Iakuneru pregnant, and therefore is one of their ancestors. The sun is a crucial animated entity in the Apurinã social world. He is considered the father of the Apurinã, and the Xiwapyrynyry moiety represents him.

We now jump ahead to the part of the story where Iakuneru meets her end. Iakuneru is again asked to leave, because she has painted the *mexikana*. At this time, she is already pregnant with Tsura, who speaks to Iakuneru from her belly. Owing to a trick played by Tsura when he is still in his mother's belly, Iakuneru takes the wrong path, and not the right one marked by the macaw feather, and ends up going to the house of the man who she had refused to marry in the past. This, as the story suggests, is a fatal mistake. Iakuneru is killed by people from her enemy's groups, yet still considered Apurinã. The earlier conflicts between Apurinã sub-groups were intense, bloody, and led to cycles of revenge.

After Iakuneru is killed and her fetus is thrown into the forest, Tsura and his brothers are born. They are powerful, and revenge their mother's death by using various tricks. In the later part of the story, Iakuneru's four sons can also transform themselves into other beings, among other things into birds in order to survive, and thus they show that they are powerful beings.

From the Tsura narrative we can note that human-other-than-human relationality exists with certain beings, not with them all. The traditional narratives are in fact crucial in telling us how the Apurinã are related to different beings, and thus how they became the Apurinã, as well as the origin of the entities in the Apurinã social world (cf. Hill 2009 concerning the Wakuénai in Venezuela). The oral histories are at the same time about the histories of both the Apurinã and some other-than-human beings in the context of the Apurinã social world. As Descola (2005) has noted about Indigenous Amazonian ontology, there is a strong similarity between humans and other-than-human beings, particularly their intentionality and sense of selfhood. The traditional Apurinã narratives express how things exist in the world in terms of the agency of animals, plants, and objects, and the Tsura story shows how animals are human like and do similar activities to humans, such as living in houses, taking the same medicinal plants as humans, planting, and serving food to each other. The vocabulary used for the other-than-human entities, both in Apurinã and Portuguese, is the same, as it relates to describing the world of humans (such as the “settlement” of animals, *awapuku*, and so forth).

Furthermore, in the Tsura *pirana*, the beings encountered in the narrative are called by kin terms, such as grandfather (*toty*), grandmother (*kyru*), father-in-law (*imatykyry*) and so forth, and thus they belong to the cultural social sphere that make beings persons (cf. Turner 2009). However, there is no material intimacy and closeness between them, and the sisters want to arrive in the land of their “real” grandfathers. Despite the kin relationship, there are issues that make beings different from the two sisters, for example their food is more like that for animals. The foods that mutum and agouti offer are not “real human” foods, and therefore the sisters do not accept them. Sharing food has been considered a typical means to produce kin relations (e.g. McCallum 1997). Here we should note that the term for two sisters (*itharu*), means they come from the same moiety (the term is also used for sisters and parallel cousins), and thus a material relationality already exists between them, and along with others they observe the same food taboos (Virtanen 2015a). Consequently, the sisters eat similar foods that belong to their moiety. Furthermore, the difference of some beings in the story to the sisters is that they are not trustworthy, an important aspect of Apurinã morality today. Generally, the Apurinã people from the same moiety can be trusted as brothers or sisters.

Although in the Tsura *pirana* the only beings with a real human’s body are in fact only *Iakuneru* and her sister, all the beings speak to each other without difficulty. Despite the social and corporeal differences, in traditional Apurinã narratives, the ability to speak also connects the beings of the story. Even the man formerly rejected by *Iakuneru*, and this man’s family, as well as other characters in the story, speak in a similar way, even if they are animals or without a human body, such as Maiuryparu’s son’s head, or have a human body, even if only partly, such

as Maiuryparu. Still today the Apurinã treat certain animals as their kin, considering some of them to be their ancient shamans. It is also worth noting that as in the Tsura story, kin animals are not called father or mother, brother or sister, but grandfather and grandmother, i.e. markers of a common ancestry. Furthermore, these terms can refer to several people, more than the two sisters' actual birth givers (see e.g. Wierzicka 2016 on kinship studies on European and non-European contexts). Thus, as in the story of the two sisters there are different markers that distinguish animals from humans, though as we have seen animals clearly act as important guides in maintaining human life. They are still today regarded as guides on account of their sounds and movements.

In the story recounted above, Tsura speaks from *Iakuneru*'s belly, telling her to do certain things. The story does not say if Tsura speaks verbally or non-verbally, but for the Apurinã intuition is a very typical form of communication, and it is thought to cause certain effects in the body. This includes knowing by means of specific feelings or dreams, among other corporeal sensations. The story actually shows that even as a fetus Tsura was already powerful because he could speak from his mother's belly. Usually in Apurinã society young children gradually turn into community members, meaning that their real humanness is gained by relating the infants to kin, and by gaining protection from certain other-than-human beings. Infants are thus not necessarily born human, but they become Apurinã by means of foods, medicinal herbs, and the many protective practices of parents (Virtanen 2015a, 2015b). Intuition can be considered as a material means to communicate, and the body being used as the material mediation form. Overall, the language materiality indicated in this part showed that having a similar language does not necessarily make someone similar, but language requires material mediation to make a communicative difference. Iconicity thus is achieved, not given in the process.

3 Metamorphoses and corporeal communicative mediation

As we saw in the Tsura story, there are several transformations, such as turning the bones of good people into a manioc plant, transforming the tube for inhaling tobacco (*mexikana*) into a man, and Tsura's brothers into birds. It becomes clear that metamorphosis plays a crucial role in portraying change, power, and knowledge in the Apurinã socio-cosmos. Beyond this narrative, the experience of metamorphosis is elemental for the contemporary processes of learning, imagining, and communication in Apurinã villages. In the Apurinã experience, the world is full of existing energies that can take different forms: changing from invisible to visible or

increasing or decreasing the energy and quality of beings in order to acquire a different appearance. Even shamans' objects can be transformed into other forms.

It has been argued that metamorphosis or transformation is about changing the perspectives on different bodies. These changes affect the way that entities can communicate and the way that worlds are experienced and especially seen (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2004). In the words of Viveiros de Castro, it is about changing "clothing," while Turner (2009) has paid more attention to the social body. The social body is made up of decorations, foods, musical instruments, various rituals, spaces, and other social ways to mark social identity that, according to Turner, change the ways people are transformed and come to be in social relations. – Apurinã shamans after their death are transformed into animals, such as jaguars, birds, snakes, still guiding people with their sounds and appearing in their dreams (Apurinã 2019; Virtanen 2019).

Metamorphosis is about the ability to communicate with entities, in some degree different from one's own self, but then these entities become part of the same communication system. In the Tsura story, we can see that no metamorphosis was involved with beings that are to a greater extent dissimilar (e.g. object to human, human to animal). Here we can also note that metamorphoses and transformations can be permanent or nonpermanent. Furthermore, in the Tsura *pirana*, as today, metamorphosis is possible for powerful beings. A powerful and knowledgeable being can make one entity turn into another entity, such as Maiuryparu turning bones into a manioc tree in the Tsura *pirana*, and powerful beings can return to their body after metamorphosis, such as the *mexikana* returning from a man to become *mexikana* again. Yet, the tube to inhale tobacco, *mexikana*, is actually made of bone, namely the leg bone of certain birds.

We want to point out that metamorphosis and transformation are material communicative practices, enabling new types of knowledge and change that are necessary for the Apurinã's life. In the current time, from a young age onwards the Apurinã learn to dream how to turn into an animal. This affects the way one understands the world and maintains the Apurinã ancestral lines (Virtanen 2015b; see also Graham 1995 on Xavante dreaming). Some Apurinã also experience metamorphosis in rituals and when consuming certain shamanic substances that are elemental in gaining new skills, strength, and knowledge and learning. This involves turning into animals and learning from their knowledges and ways of perceiving the world. Metamorphoses also make humans gain autonomy and become real persons, the *Pupýkary* (see also Santos-Granero 2012). The metamorphosis from humans to other-than-human beings and from other-than-human beings to humans is possible for a limited and restricted time and space.

Even today in normal conditions metamorphosis is possible for shamans (*m̃ỹty*, *kusanaty*). Today it is narrated as a crucial moment in the process of becoming a shaman, which requires special techniques, isolation, and dedication. If a person succeeds in becoming a shaman, the training typically ends when the novice finally experiences an encounter with a jaguar (*h̃akyty*) or *sucurijũ* snake (*kỹ̃te*), which are typical auxiliary spirits of Apurinã shamans. The shaman novice experiences a metamorphosis into the worlds of these entities that appear in a humanlike form. As a result of corporeal mediation and new perceptions, the novice is able to speak to them, as human to human. The initiation eventually typically finishes when the initiator turns into an animal and both human and animal exchange *awiri* snuff together. Then the jaguar or the *sucurujũ* snake spirit – depending on which season of the year and in which line the novice is training – offers its powers in the form of shamanic stones that allow the shaman to both heal and cause illnesses. From then on, shamans are able to speak to their auxiliary spirits as humans at any time. Auxiliary spirits can also be master spirits of plants and other animals. Some meteorological phenomena also have this capability, and consequently possess knowledge and power, but they are not associated with all animals and plants.

Such beings are not mentioned in the story of Tsurá, but in many other traditional stories they are, which crucially sets the socio-cosmology of the Apurinã. Traditional oral narrations as well as contemporary personal narratives today point to relationships between humans and other-than-human beings, reflecting the correct ways of acting of different beings, as well as their knowledges and powers. The traditional narratives describe how master spirits have earlier been Apurinã shamans who after their death were transformed into other entities. Consequently, they continue acting as Apurinã teachers and spiritual guides, visible and nonvisible, appearing in dreams or guiding by their sounds. This shows how in Apurinã thought animals and plants are actors in a social world, in contrast to the generic category of “the environment,” and there are in fact several other-than-human worlds.

Master spirits are also diverse, and they can include different winds, the trees, the rocks, the animals, and the thunder. In earlier works, the first author has analyzed master spirit narrations and how they are thought of as having an immediate effect on human lives, and consequently they are both feared and respected (Apurinã 2019; Virtanen 2015a). The role of such spirits is to take care of other beings and to use only resources that are necessary, but it is said that this was never fully followed nor respected even by the Apurinã, and therefore some of the spirits have diseases. In the following section we address the materiality of storytelling practices that are crucial for the production of traditional knowledge.

4 The materiality of storytelling

Research has shown that storytelling is very much about performance (e.g. Farnell 2002; Nuckolls 1996; Sherzer 1983). Performance is also significant for making the message of Apurinã narrations clear. Furthermore, with the Apurinã, the material mediation of storytelling is elemental. Firstly, the nature of storytelling practice is in the material presence of the community members. Earlier studies have also pointed out how speaking is inseparable from both the physical and cultural context, which can also allow or deny certain discourses and use of language (e.g. Brenneis 1984; Shankar and Cavanaugh 2012, 2017). Apurinã stories are typically narrated when people gather together after meals, in the presence of elders, and when traditional medicinal herbs are used. In these moments people can feel a sense of confidence and trust. Narrating traditional and contemporary stories also depends on the narrators' sentiments and experiences, which crucially affect the ways the stories are told and performed. When the audience and the storyteller share a similar evidentiary basis, this similarity is considered worth reflecting on together with the speaker (see Kuipers 2013 on evidence as communicative practice). In contexts where storytellers feel relaxed, they can show their talents, animating their stories with gestures and by using specific expressions for states of being. Such stories are often passed down from generation to generation, both men and women learning them according to their own memorizing and storytelling capacities. As mentioned earlier, stories, such as the Tsurá *pirana*, are told according to personality, personal histories, and the region. Both traditional and contemporary narratives differ especially depending on the speaker and the place, because they narrate their own place-based relations that are woven into and experienced through different entities.

During storytelling speakers make use of different parts of their bodies to make exemplary sounds and movements that animate the stories and convey the message to the listeners. The body techniques and ideophones are crucial parts of storytelling. They materialize the knowledge of the storyteller and contextualize the listeners to certain episode of the story. In stories the use of silence or whispering is also crucial, making the beings represented in the story more real, material, or intimate. Similar phenomena occur when movements are controlled and when acts of avoidance keep the master spirits favorable. The stories can also make new communicative paths, similar to the use of songs, for instance, that attract, appeal to and even domesticate spirits by describing them as human (see also Chaumeil 2010; Gutierrez Choquevilca 2011). The way that storytellers relate to the characters in the stories recreates both sameness and difference, the positions between different beings in the socio-cosmos, and also establish differences with both other Indigenous groups and non-Indians. Sameness and difference are

crucially made materially visible and imitated by teaching about humans and other-than-human beings (see also Uzendoski and Calapacha-Tapuy 2012).

The role of the material world in the Amerindian societies' myth telling has also been noted by Greg Urban (2001, 43): "An individual learns myths by listening to others to tell them. The individual internalizes them, but that internalization is made apparent only when the individual in turn retells the myth, that is, reexternalizes it in concrete, audible sounds and bodily gestures understandable as (more or less) equivalent to the earlier tellings. The reexternalization provides the occasion for a public to check on internalization." The materiality of Apurinã storytelling is embedded in the family or community gathering.

Besides, storytelling typically requires the material presence of *awiri* (tobacco powder), inhaled individually by the *mexikana*, and sometimes *katsupary* (a mix of coca leaves, certain vines, and *cacau* fruit ashes) chewed while telling the stories. Such typical materials are used to mediate the stories, convey memories and connect with ancestors. They also work at the level of emotions and thus affect people and their imaginations. *Katsupary* and *awiri* are typically shamans' tools, but they are also used by other people. They increase the degree of intimacy with the other-than-human entities of the same social system, and the worlds within "one" Apurinã social system. Stories create worlds within worlds, and they also present different techniques to enter these worlds.

Transforming into specific worlds of different entities or entering into communication with them requires specific techniques and material mediation. Among the Apurinã, the negotiation with shaman's auxiliary spirits as well as with master spirits is permitted through the very same material means: *awiri* and *katsupari*, but also through corporeal diet, musical instruments, such as *kuitxi* (flute), dreaming, singing, and so forth. Several ethnographic studies about other parts of the Amazon address the use of flutes and their sonic ways of enabling communication with the spirit world as well as intermediation between humans, ancestors, and master spirits (see Hill and Chaumeil 2011).- The Apurinã's master spirits are especially called to communal festivities (*kyynyry*), through sounds and carrying certain materials, such as moriche palm leaves, and the arrival and departure of spirits require long rituals that only certain trained and experienced persons can manage and undertake. *Kyynyry* festivity chants mention caimans, certain birds, and specific palm trees contributing to group identity and making Apurinã values visible. In these rituals, it becomes evident how they open up a way to experience the world of other beings. The presence and importance of certain other-than-human beings in Apurinã history is shown by singing and ritual activities. Dancing, objects, foods, singing and speaking in Amerindian rituals have a special power; they are in fact entities in themselves that affect people (see e.g. Hill 2009; Hill and Chaumeil 2011; Nuckolls 1996; Seeger 1987; Severi and Lagrou 2013; Walker 2018). Singing and ritual speech are like "actants" in

the Latourian sense (1993), but as Magnus Course (2012) has noted in his article “The Birth of the Word,” for the Mapuche, the words and speech itself cannot have agency. Words are linked to the life force, or to the immanent force of the world (*newen*), which are manifest in the “word” (*dungu*), which flows through a person (who has ritual authority). These three things, world, word and person, are connected through the intrinsic interconnectedness of agents, both human and other-than-human. It is in the relationality of entities and in their process that new beings can be brought into being. And, it should be noted here that in the Amazon, other-than-human beings are regarded as having their own knowledge and their “chiefs” (Chaumeil 2010; Fausto 2008), like Apurinã, and so other-than-human beings are not simply under the control of humans. They can transform themselves from one form to another, just as energy takes different forms in its flow. In the Amazon world everything is moving, and this in itself is a guarantee of life.

5 Conclusions

This article has shown how the linguistic community of the Apurinã in Brazilian Amazonia includes several other-than-human beings since the time of the origin stories. Speakers of many other languages distinguish the entities that they talk to or about. In a similar fashion, we show that the Apurinã make use of linguistic resources to establish the ways they interact with different entities. However, the materiality of their language creates a crucial social difference between being an Apurinã (see also High 2018) and creating their social systems and different worlds with other-than-human beings. Today, though, these material means of communication with other-than-human entities require considerable investments, such as preparations of tobacco snuff, corporeal restrictions, and communal meetings with the same evidentiary basis. On account of power relations, prejudice, missionary and other influences, these communicative processes can be harder to achieve than in earlier times.

Besides the importance of corporeality and material communicative practices, the material mediation of oral stories is inseparable from the narrative, as this mediation shows the importance of materiality in story telling moments (see also Brenneis 1984). Here we have shown that storytelling cannot be separated from materiality, as the regeneration of Apurinã stories is closely linked to material means and settings, and the stories are materially lived by the individuals in relational spaces between other-than-human beings and the community. Earlier it has been noted that specific chants and spells, as well as non-verbal geometric designs and movements, crucially point to otherwise invisible other-than-human beings, and materiality becomes a complementary part of these relations (Severi 2014). These are contingent and uncertain, yet community shares experience-based

knowledge about their subjective and decisive powers, and thus they affect the story telling actions, emotions, and storytellers' narrative lines. With the Apurinã, neither language nor its materiality precede each other, as they originate in the same ancestral time. The materiality of storytelling situates the participants in fluid nonlinear time. Consequently, imagined, materialized, and spoken elements form indivisibly that have been called felicity conditions (cf. Austin 1962: 14–15) or semiotic ideologies (cf. Keane 2003).

Language is an important way to express and register ways of interacting with different people and other entities. Not surprisingly, therefore, language is sensitive to the distinctions that the Apurinã make between different entities and surroundings. With their stories, the Apurinã point to the material existence of other-than-human beings and to the fact that human existence depends on the worlds of numerous specific other-than-human beings. The materiality of storytelling plays a key role in co-building some of these relations as more intimate social systems (Nuckolls 2010; Uzendoski and Calapacha-Tapuy 2012; Webster 2015). Stories are crucial means to bring together and make visible the worlds of forest animals, plants, water life, and meteorological animated entities, whose acts and movements can never be fully known. Through the materiality of storytelling, including accompanying plant substances and objects, such as *katsupari*, *awiri* and *mexikana*, the relationships and interactions of stories become corporeally experienced, individually at the level of each storyteller and member of the audience. Storytelling allows the material encounter of subjects and permits entry into relational human-other-than-human spaces, namely the interconnections that constitute the past and the present of the Apurinã people.

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